

ENGLISH MASTERED · BUSINESS ENGLISH

Business Email Etiquette

Tone, Openings & Sign-offs

How professional English email actually works — register, requests, openings and sign-offs, and the small edits that change how people answer you.

BUSINESS ENGLISH · B1+

Lesson Overview

Objective. This lesson is about a simple problem: an email can be perfectly correct and still get the wrong reaction — too blunt, too long, or too cold. Most email problems are not grammar problems. They are *register* problems: the habits that make writing polite in one language don't transfer cleanly into another.

You will learn the shape of a professional English email, how to read your audience, and how to hold a register from greeting to sign-off. Then we look at where Arabic writing instincts show up in English, and practise the edits that fix them without losing your voice.

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Register and politeness in written requests — varying your language for the situation, from the direct (*Send me the file.*) to the everyday (*Could you please send me the file?*) to the formal and hedged (*I would be grateful if you could send me the file.*).

IN THIS LESSON

- 1 The English email at a glance**
The five parts every message needs, the three registers, knowing your audience, and the politeness ladder for requests.
- 2 Writing in English when you think in Arabic**
Two traditions of politeness, and four transfer patterns to edit for: generous openings, direct requests, the *wa...* sentence, and small mechanics.
- 3 Phrase bank and practice**
Functional language you can reuse, the bridge from spoken business vocabulary into email, today's conventions, and writing tasks.

SECTION ONE

The English Email at a Glance



Structure, register, and the politeness ladder: who your reader is, and the conventions they're measuring you against, whether they know it or not.

The Five Parts of a Professional Email

Every effective business email has the same skeleton. Readers don't notice it when it's there; they only notice when something is missing.

- 1 Subject line.** Specific and action-oriented, with the key words first — a phone shows only the first thirty characters or so. *Approve Q4 brief by Friday beats Quick question.*
- 2 Greeting.** Matched to the relationship: *Dear Ms Haddad* for first contact, *Hi Sarah* for a colleague you know.
- 3 Body.** One topic, short paragraphs, the most important sentence first. If you have three separate points, use three short lines, not one long paragraph.
- 4 Call to action.** Name the next step, the owner, and the deadline: *Could you confirm the budget figure by Thursday?*
- 5 Sign-off.** A closing line plus your name; in external email, add your role and contact details.

THE ONE THAT GETS FORGOTTEN

The call to action is the line that tells the reader what happens next. An email without one leaves its reader *informed but unasked* — and waiting for a reply that never has a reason to come.

A Worked Example

Five parts, sixty words, one ask with a deadline. Ms Haddad knows exactly what Layla wants on the first read, with no unnecessary text to dig through.

TO n.haddad@mea.com.lb
FROM l.mansour@mea.com.lb

Approve Q4 brief by Fri 14 June

Dear Ms Haddad,

Thank you for your time on Tuesday. The Q4 brief is attached for your approval.

CALL TO ACTION ————— Part 4 of the five · see p.4

Could you confirm the budget figure by Thursday? I'll then circulate the final version to the team.

Kind regards,

Layla Mansour

Marketing Assistant, Middle East Airlines · +961 1 534 267

READ IT BACK

The skill is restraint. The boxed line is the **call to action** — part 4 of the five parts on page 4: the one sentence that names the next step and its deadline. Every other line exists to make that single ask easy to say yes to.

The Three Registers

English email runs on three broad levels of formality. The key is keeping your greeting, your requests, and your sign-off on the same level all the way through.

REGISTER	WHEN	GREETING	SIGN-OFF
Formal	First contact, clients, senior people, anything official	Dear Mr Khoury, Dear Ms Haddad,	Kind regards, Sincerely,
Neutral	Most workplace email, regular contacts	Hello Sarah, Hi Sarah,	Best regards, Best,
Friendly	Colleagues you know well, internal threads	Hi Sam, Morning Sam,	Thanks, Cheers,

Unsure which level to use? Read what the other person sent you, then match it — or sit one notch more formal until a more casual relationship is established. **Kind regards** is the safest all-purpose closing in international business. (In Britain you may still meet the old formal pair: *Dear Sir or Madam* → *Yours faithfully*.)

THE READER CAN'T HEAR YOUR VOICE

In conversation, your tone and your face do half the work of politeness. In email, the words do all of it — which is why written English leans on softening phrases that would sound unnecessary, or awkward, out loud.

The Politeness Ladder for Requests

Five ways to ask for the same file, from bluntest to most padded. Most professional requests live on the middle rungs.

Send me the file.	A bare imperative. It reads as an order, even between friends. Use in emergencies only.
Please send me the file.	Softer, but <i>please</i> + imperative is still an instruction, not a request.
Could you send me the file?	The everyday workhorse. A question leaves the reader room to say no; that room is what English politeness is made of.
Could you please send me the file by Thursday?	The workhorse dressed for work: question, please, deadline. Handles 80% of professional requests.
I would be grateful if you could send me the file.	Formal and hedged. Use this for big asks, senior readers, first contact.

Which rung do you choose? Audience and context decide. Ask three questions: are you writing **up** to a manager, **across** to a peer, or **out** to a client; how big is the ask; and how well do you know the reader? The bigger the ask and the more senior the reader, the higher you climb.

WHY SO INDIRECT?

Could you send me the file? is not really a question, and both of you know it is a request. But this indirectness is not deception — it is a courtesy signal, the written equivalent of a knock before entering. The reader hears the request perfectly. They also hear that you gave them room to say no.

SECTION TWO

Writing in English When You Think in Arabic



Four habits that transfer from Arabic into English email: why they happen, how they're read, and the edits that fix them.

Two Traditions of Politeness

Every language teaches you what “polite” looks like on the page. The trouble starts when two languages teach opposite lessons. Arabic correspondence has a long, proud tradition of generosity in writing. A well-formed letter:

- opens with a greeting and a blessing: **تحية طيبة وبعد** (*taḥiyya ṭayyiba wa-ba’d*, “warm greetings, and to proceed”)
- asks after the reader and honours their title
- closes with elevated respect: **وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير** (“please accept my highest consideration and esteem”)

The eloquence is the point. It shows the reader you took care; brevity would look like indifference. English business email grew up somewhere stingier — in the telegram and the office memo, where every word cost money and the reader’s minutes were the scarcest resource in the building (they still are). In this tradition, care looks like *compression*: the writer who respects you is the one who took the time to need less of yours.

So the two traditions define respect in opposite directions. In Arabic, you honour the reader with **your words**. In English business email, you honour the reader with **their time**. Neither is wrong — but write English with Arabic instincts, and your reader receives length instead of warmth, and goes looking for the point.

BEFORE WE START FIXING THINGS

These patterns are tendencies researchers observe across many Arabic-speaking learners — not a description of you, and not a defect to erase. The goal is a second register you *control*: warm when you choose warm, brief when you choose brief. Writers who hold both traditions have a genuine advantage; most monolingual English writers only have one.

The Generous Opening

The most visible transfer of all: an Arabic-style opening, translated into English, reading not as courtesy, but as *delay*.

BEFORE · THE INSTINCT

Dear Respected Mr Davies,
I hope this email finds you in the best of health, and that you and your esteemed family are enjoying every success. It is a great honour to write to you, and I pray your week has been filled with achievement.
I am writing because I wanted to kindly ask about the delivery schedule...

AFTER · THE EDIT

Dear Mr Davies,
I hope you're well. I'm writing to confirm the delivery schedule for Thursday's shipment.

An English reader scans the first version with growing unease; three sentences in, there is still no subject. The warmth doesn't register as warmth but as cost in a crowded inbox. The same applies at the other end: a closing like *with my deepest respect and highest consideration* compresses, in English, to two words — **Kind regards**.

THE FIX

One warm line, maximum (*I hope you're well* or *I hope you had a good weekend*), then your purpose. Your request belongs in the first three lines of the email, always. Save the genuine warmth for the relationship itself — a phone call, a meeting, the way you handle their problems.

Requests That Land Harder Than You Meant

Here is the surprising one. When researchers read English emails sent by students whose first language is Arabic, they keep finding the same combination inside one message: a warm, respectful opening, and then a request with almost no padding at all.

This is Arabic pragmatics working exactly as designed. Between colleagues, directness signals closeness and trust; softening a request with a near-stranger's caution would put distance between you. Study after study finds Arabic speakers' English requests more direct than native speakers', even when writing up to professors and managers. But English email doesn't read directness as closeness. It reads it as *pressure*. The default is conventional indirectness with everyone — even people you've worked beside for years.

BEFORE

Send me the final prices today. Also tell Karim about the meeting.

AFTER

Could you please send me the final prices by the end of today? It would also be great if you could let Karim know about the meeting.

Notice what the edit did: imperatives became questions, the bare deadline became *by the end of today*, and the second instruction got its own softener. The message is identical. The reception is not.

THE FIX

Before sending, find every verb that tells the reader to do something (*send, tell, confirm, check*) and climb most of them to the question rung: **Could you...?** For anything sizeable, or anyone senior, climb higher: **I would be grateful if you could...**

The *wa...* Sentence

Arabic prose flows on connectives like *wa* (“and”) and *fa* (“so, then”); a skilled writer can carry a whole paragraph on a single breath. English prose stops far more often. When the Arabic rhythm transfers, the result is a sentence that is grammatically survivable and completely exhausting:

BEFORE

I received your email **and** I checked the prices with our supplier **and** he said the delivery will arrive next week **and** I will confirm the final date tomorrow **and** please tell the customer.

AFTER

Thank you for your email. I’ve checked the prices with our supplier, and delivery is expected next week. I’ll confirm the final date tomorrow — could you let the customer know?

Each idea gets its own sentence, the chain of *ands* becomes full stops, and the buried instruction at the end surfaces as a proper request. Four ideas, four sentences. This is also where bullet points earn their place: if an email carries three or more parallel items (dates, prices, questions), a short list is kinder than even the best-built sentence.

THE FIX

One idea, one sentence. If you’ve written *and* twice, you almost certainly need a full stop. Read your draft aloud: anywhere you’d take a breath, the reader needs punctuation.

The Small Mechanics

Three little error families that teachers of Arabic speakers know by heart. None of them blocks understanding. All of them get noticed.

Articles

Arabic has no indefinite article and uses its definite article differently, so *a* and *the* go missing or multiply.

TRANSFER

I attached file for your review.

We can discuss the both options.

EDIT

I've attached **a** file for your review.

We can discuss both options.

Prepositions

Arabic prepositions don't map one-to-one onto English ones, so the Arabic choice gets translated literally.

TRANSFER

I am afraid from the delay.

We will discuss about the contract.

I will contact with you tomorrow.

EDIT

I am afraid **of** the delay.

We will discuss the contract.

I will contact you tomorrow.

Capital letters

Arabic script has no capitals, so English capitalisation is a habit that must be built — and under time pressure it is the first thing to go. The repeat offenders: *i* for *I*, days and months (*monday* → *Monday*), and names. A lowercase *i* in a business email is tiny and loud at the same time.

THE FIX

Make these three families your personal proofreading pass: once your draft is written, sweep it once for articles, once for prepositions, once for capitals. Thirty seconds, every time.

SECTION THREE

Phrase Bank and Practice



Language you can lift straight into your next email, the bridge from speaking to writing, today's conventions, and tasks.

Your Phrase Bank

These are the chunks professional email is actually built from. Learn them as whole phrases; they do their job precisely because the reader has seen them ten thousand times.

FUNCTION	MORE FORMAL	EVERYDAY
Opening line	I hope this finds you well.	I hope you're well. / I hope you had a good weekend.
Stating purpose	I am writing with regard to... / Further to our conversation...	I'm writing about... / Just a quick note about...
Requesting	I would be grateful if you could...	Could you please...? / Would you be able to...?
Attaching	Please find attached the report.	I've attached the report for your review.
Saying no	I regret to inform you that... / Unfortunately, we are unable to...	I'm afraid that... / Unfortunately, that won't be possible, but...
Following up	I am writing to follow up on... / I was wondering if you'd had a chance to...	Just following up on... / Just checking in on...
Closing line	I look forward to hearing from you.	Let me know if you have any questions. / Thanks in advance.

TWO RETIREMENTS AND A WARNING

I hope this email finds you well has been used so heavily (especially by AI writing tools of late) that many readers now skip it on sight; the everyday alternatives age better. And *per my last email* is technically polite but universally read as an accusation. When you chase a reply, chase forward: **I'm just following up on...**

Vocabulary You Already Own

In the *Personal Contacts* unit you built the vocabulary of business relationships: *arrange, confirm, postpone, cancel, offer, delivery*. Email is where that vocabulary goes to work. Most appointments are made, moved, and unmade in writing.

YOU LEARNED TO SAY

IN AN EMAIL, IT BECOMES

arrange a meeting	I'm writing to arrange a meeting to discuss the new contract.
confirm	Just to confirm — we're meeting at 10:00 on Tuesday. / Could you confirm receipt?
postpone	I'm afraid we'll have to postpone Thursday's call. Would Friday at the same time work?
cancel	Unfortunately, we need to cancel tomorrow's appointment. I apologise for the short notice.
make an offer	Thank you for your offer. We would be happy to proceed on those terms.
delivery	I'm writing to confirm the delivery date for order #4471.

ONE MORE BRIDGE

The spoken *let's get down to business* has a written cousin: **I'll get straight to the point.** Both signal, politely, that the small talk is over.

How Email Is Read Now

The conventions below are not grammar; they are habits of the modern inbox. They change slowly, but they do change.

- **Is email the right channel?** It is the most efficient channel in business and one of the least rich: no tone of voice, no face, but free, asynchronous, and self-documenting. Quick requests and confirmations belong in it; hard news or untangling a misunderstanding deserves a call. For anything important, reinforce it in a second channel.
- **Write for the phone.** Most email is opened on a mobile screen: front-load the subject line, stay under about 150 words, and turn anything list-like into a list.
- **The 24-hour rule.** Reply within one business day, or acknowledge and name a date: *Thanks for this — I'll come back to you by Thursday.*
- **To, CC, BCC.** *To* = action expected. *CC* = awareness only. *BCC* = large lists. And *Reply All* should be rarer than it is.
- **Emoji: off by default.** In formal email, smileys make senders look less competent, not warmer. In a friendly team thread, follow the room.
- **AI drafts are first drafts.** Large language models overuse tired phrases, and most people can tell. Use AI to draft and revise, then edit yourself: cut the filler openings, check every fact, and make it sound like you.

THE ONE-LINE TEST

Before you hit send, ask: could the reader act on this from a phone, in ten seconds, without scrolling? If not, it's too long or the ask is buried. An email plus a word in the meeting beats either alone.

Writing Tasks

Work through these in order. Each one targets a single pattern from Section Two before the final task puts everything together.

1 Trim the opening **OPENING**

Cut this opening to one warm line plus a purpose line: “Dear Respected Madam, I hope my email finds you in excellent health and that your esteemed company continues to grow from success to success. It is my great pleasure to write to you today because I would like to ask about your training programmes.”

2 Soften the requests **REQUESTS**

Rewrite each request one or two rungs up the politeness ladder: (a) Send me the invoice again. (b) Tell me when the shipment arrives. (c) Answer before Friday.

3 Break the sentence **SENTENCE**

Rewrite as three or four sentences; surface the hidden request properly: “I spoke with the warehouse and they found the missing boxes and they will send them on Monday and the tracking number will come tomorrow and inform the client please.”

4 Error hunt **MECHANICS**

This email contains six mechanical errors (articles, prepositions, capitals). Find and fix them: “Hi Omar, i checked with supplier and the delivery will arrive on monday. I attached file with the details. We can discuss about the prices in our call. Best, Rana”

5 The real thing **CAPSTONE**

Write the email. You must postpone Thursday’s meeting with a client you have met once. Include the full email: subject line, greeting, one warm line, the news, two alternative times, and a sign-off. Sixty to ninety words. Before you send it, run the proofreading pass from Pattern Four.

Suggested Answers

Your wording can differ; what matters is the pattern. Compare structures, not words.

ANSWER KEY

- 1 Dear Ms Saab, I hope you're well. I'm writing to ask about your training programmes.
- 2 (a) Could you please send me the invoice again? (b) Could you let me know when the shipment arrives? (c) I would be grateful if you could reply by Friday.
- 3 I spoke with the warehouse, and they've found the missing boxes. They will send them on Monday, and the tracking number should arrive tomorrow. Could you please inform the client?
- 4 Hi Omar, I checked with **the** supplier and the delivery will arrive on **Monday**. I've attached **a** file with the details. We can discuss the prices **on** our call. Best, Rana. — capitals ×2, articles ×2, prepositions ×2 (discuss about → discuss; in our call → on our call).

CHECKLIST FOR TASK 5 (AND EVERY EMAIL AFTER IT)

- ✓ Subject line: specific, key words first
- ✓ One warm line, then the point
- ✓ One idea per sentence
- ✓ Under 150 words
- ✓ Greeting and sign-off on the same register
- ✓ Every request in question form or higher
- ✓ Sweep for articles, prepositions, capitals

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END OF LESSON

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Tone, Openings & Sign-offs

EM English Mastered